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THE WHITE HOUSE

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants: The President

William Handley, U. S. Ambassador to Turkey

Emil Mosbacher, U. S. Chief of Protocol

Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

Date and Place: 1:15 p.m. August 17, 1970 in the President's Oval Office

After general conversation during a photo session, Ambassador Handley opened the substantive part of the meeting by explaining to the President the recent restrictions which the Government of Turkey has decreed to decrease the number of provinces in which the opium poppy is grown. He showed the President a page-size map indicating the provinces in which it is still legal to grow opium and those in which growing has recently been prohibited. He then explained that the next step is for the Turkish Government to pass a licensing bill which would provide stricter measures for enforcing the limitations on growing.

The President responded by saying that it is very important that we cut off as many sources of these drugs as we possibly can. The drug problem has become a serious one not only in our cities but in our suburbs.

The President then asked how our relations are generally with Turkey.

Ambassador Handley replied that they are fundamentally sound. The Turkish Government still bases its policy on the NATO alliance. It is devoting more of its GNP to NATO goals than any other of our NATO partners. When the U. S. was recently forced to withdraw from Wheelus Base in Libya, the Turks quietly permitted us to expand our range facilities at Incirlik Airbase. There has recently been a back lash against the Turkish left following its challenge to the army in recent public disorders. The President indicated his understanding that the army occupies a special place in recent Turkish history as a defender of the republic. Ambassador Handley said that anti-Americanism by itself is not a major problem but that the leftists use that issue for their own purposes in attacking the Turkish establishment.

The President asked who makes up the left in Turkey. Ambassador Handley replied that since there is no legal Communist party, the formal left is the Turkish Labor Party with a base among the young and among the Marxist element in the Turkish labor movement.

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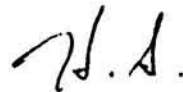
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Ambassador Handley volunteered that we had recently "run into something of a buzz saw" in relation to the opium question and Turkish public opinion. A number of those who wish to attack the Turkish establishment have tried to capitalize on the charge that the Demirel Government is bowing to American pressure in reducing opium growing.

The President reiterated that it is very important for us to close off as many sources of narcotics as possible but said that we do not want to embarrass the Demirel Government. He repeated: "You tell them that we won't embarrass them publicly. But privately you should say that this issue is terribly important to us." The President concluded by saying, "That is the line."

Ambassador Handley noted that he had briefed several Congressional groups during his present consultation. He explained the pressures that are building up in the form of amendments to trade and aid legislation which would throw the whole issue back into the President's lap to decide whether Turkey, for instance, is taking adequate measures to control opium growing. The Ambassador said he felt that, at this point, Turkey could be judged to be taking serious steps. He explained some of the details of the licensing bill that the Government will attempt to have passed at the next parliamentary session -- how it provides for Government collectors of the crop to pay cash, provides per diem for them, and so on.

The President indicated his understanding of this improved collection effort, noting the importance of quiet cooperation. He likened the Congressional pressures to those against military assistance to Greece. There were those here -- as well as the Danes and others -- who felt we should not aid Greece. But with the situation what it is in the eastern Mediterranean, one looks at the Danish forces and at Greece's 10 divisions and the choice is pretty clear. One looks at the Turkish forces and dedication to NATO and it is plain that we cannot jeopardize our fundamental relationship.



Harold H. Saunders

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